

A blue decorative shape in the top right corner, consisting of a rectangle with a curved bottom-left edge.

Section 2.6

AESTHETICS

A thin green curved line in the bottom right corner, starting from the left and curving upwards and to the right.

2.6 Aesthetics

Aesthetics impacts are addressed in Section 4.2 of the EOMSP Final EIR. The previously certified EIR identified significant and mitigable impacts to Landform Alteration/Visual Quality. The landform alteration impacts were associated with grading of the hillside residential area. The aesthetics impacts were associated with industrial development adjacent to Johnson Canyon in the northern portion of the Specific Plan area. No significant landform alteration and visual impacts were expected from development of the flatter industrial and commercial uses (which include the project site) in the EOMSP area.

The EOMSP Final EIR considered that views from SR-125 and SR-905 would include views of the regional commercial area in the foreground (at about 600 feet elevation) with the San Ysidro Mountains raising up to about 3,000 feet elevation, about five miles in the distance, and that compliance with policies of the Urban Design Element and site planning and design guidelines of the Specific Plan (County 2005a) would ensure that the commercial center would not significantly impact future scenic highways in the area. A number of mitigation measures were recommended to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts. Neither the landform alteration or aesthetics impacts and the associated mitigation measures identified in the prior EIR are applicable to the proposed project.

2.6.1 Existing Conditions

Existing Visual Setting/Character

The project site is currently undeveloped and includes low, undulating slopes (Figures 1-3 and 1-4). The majority of the site includes non-native grasslands, non-native vegetation, and disturbed habitat (Figure 2.3-1). No unique or prominent landforms or rock outcrops occur on the project site. Roadways surround the project on all sides except to the north.

As illustrated in Figure 1-3, the immediate area around the site is vacant except for two major transportation facilities. The SR-125 northbound ramp lies along the project's western boundary. Otay Mesa Road is adjacent to the south. Vacant land continues to the north and east, except for the Donovan Correctional Facility located approximately one mile to the northeast. Land to the immediate west and south, beyond SR-125 and Otay Mesa Road, is vacant for approximately one-third of a mile; beyond that, the land is developed with industrial uses, self-storage, and a gas station. The gas station, Pilot Travel Center, is located approximately 0.75 mile to the east. The Lakespur development to the southeast of the proposed project consists of a 90-megawatt power plant and includes 60-foot-tall exhaust stack, several large towers, and large tanks. Brown Field Municipal Airport lies approximately 1.25 miles west of the project. The nearest visual resources are the Otay River Valley, which is approximately two miles to the north, and the San Ysidro Mountains, which lie approximately two miles to the east. The East Otay Mesa area is generally characterized as light industrial with undeveloped, non-native grassland.

Existing Views

Other than the bordering roadways, the project does not lie within the viewshed of any important public vantage points. Roadways with views of the site include Otay Mesa Road, SR-125, and Harvest Road. Roadways to the west of SR-125 do not have views of the site, since SR-125 is elevated relative to the west. Areas to the east of SR-125 and SR-905 are relatively flat and slight increases in topography or intervening structures obstruct views of the site.

Otay Mesa Road

The site is visible to motorists traveling east and west on Otay Mesa Road from the Sanyo Avenue intersection to a point mid-way between Piper Ranch Road and SR-125 southbound. The number of viewers on the Otay Mesa Road segment between SR-125 to SR-905 connector (16,686 ADT) is about double the amount of viewers on the Harvest Road to Sanyo Avenue segment (8,224 ADT; Appendix B). Due to the limited terrain on the site and surrounding area, the site is not visually prominent. Views in the foreground include large single-story buildings and vacant lots. Long-range views consist of the San Ysidro Mountains to the east.

SR-125

Motorists on SR-125 do not see the site until they are adjacent to the southern half of the site due to intervening topography. Specifically, the SR-125 has a berm on the eastern side of the freeway along the northern half of the site, which limits visibility of the site. Views of the site from further north on SR-125 are blocked because of the rolling hill that peaks to the north of the site. The SR-125 has a high (30,000 ADT; Appendix B) volume of viewers, however, the site view duration is very low because of the visibility issues and higher freeway speeds. Views from SR-125 adjacent to the site consist of large, single-story industrial buildings to the west, and the power plant and predominantly vacant land with San Ysidro Mountains in the background to the east.

Harvest Road

The site is highly visible from Harvest Road due to the roadway elevation relative to the site. Harvest Road is currently a dirt road that conveys a low amount of traffic and, therefore, this viewpoint is considered to have a low number of viewers. Views from this roadway consist of the power plant, and undeveloped areas in the foreground, and San Ysidro Mountains in the background to the east. The SR-125 berm elevations and SR-905 prevent distant views to the west.

Applicable Plans and Policies

Applicable policies protecting and preserving landforms and visual quality within the EOMSP area are contained within the County's Hillside Review Policy, RPO, Light Pollution Code (LPC) and the Conservation and Scenic Highway Elements. In addition, the EOMSP contains policies within its Conservation and Urban Design Elements and Site Planning and Design Guidelines (Design Guidelines) that are applicable to the proposed project.

County Light Pollution Code Ordinance

The Dark Sky Ordinance (Division 9 of the Light Pollution Code [LPC]) restricts the use of outdoor lighting that emits undesirable light rays into the night sky. The intent of this code is to minimize lighting that may affect astronomical research at the Mount Palomar and Mount Laguna observatories. The LPC defines two zones in the unincorporated portion of San Diego County, Zone A and B. Zone A consists of areas within a 15-mile radius of Mount Laguna and Mount Palomar. Zone B includes all remaining areas within the unincorporated County. The project site is located within Zone B.

Conservation Element

The Conservation Element identifies Otay Mountain (within the San Ysidro Mountains) as a Resource Conservation Area (RCA) as a scenic resource because it represents a scenic landmark for the region.

Scenic Highway Element

The Scenic Highways Element identifies SR-125 and Harvest Road as third-priority scenic highways. The section of SR-125, included in this designation, extends from the U.S.-Mexico International Border north to Telegraph Canyon Road. The designation for Harvest Road covers that portion from the U.S.-Mexico International Border to Proctor Valley Road.

East Otay Mesa Specific Plan

Subarea 1 of the EOMSP contains policies that govern the visual qualities of development within the Specific Plan area including landscaping, site planning, architectural, and development standards. Per the EOMSP, the maximum building height of a commercial center site is 35 feet. Surrounding designated technology business park areas to the north and east have a height limit of 150 feet and the designated light industrial area to the west of the site past SR-125 has a building height limit of 100 feet. The EOMSP also specifies permitted materials for retaining walls. Timber retaining walls are prohibited.

Zoning

Zoning Ordinance Sections 6250 to 6290 establishes the on-site sign regulations, including height, number of signs, and size of signs. Per Section 6252, Exempt On-Premise Signs, placement, number, and size of on-premise signs shall be determined by the conditions of approval of the Major Use Permit.

2.6.2 Analysis of Project Effects and Determination as to Significance

Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

The following guidelines used to determine significance are based on the County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements- Visual Resources (July 30, 2007).

A significant impact with respect to visual character would occur if the proposed project:

1. Introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the areas or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.
2. Would result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees and rock outcroppings.
3. Would substantially obstruct, interrupt or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreation area.
4. Not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan or Historic District's Zoning.

Analysis

Visual Character/Quality (Guideline 1)

Development of the subject property would represent a change in the visual character of the property as it would transform the site from vacant land to a shopping center. The character of the proposed development would be similar in bulk and scale to the industrial developments, which are approximately one-third of a mile to the south and east. Although the surrounding areas are vacant, they are designated for development. Specifically, land to the east and north is designated for technology business park uses. Past SR-125, to the west, the area is designated for light industrial. The area to the south is designated as industrial park by the City of San Diego. Overall, these designations would allow development similar or greater bulk and scale relative to the proposed project, and much taller buildings. Per the EOMSP, technology business park areas to the north and east have a height limit of 150 feet, and the light industrial area to the east of the site has a building height limit of 100 feet.

Although the proposed retail uses would be compatible with the planned development around the project site, the two pylon signs (See Figures 1-8a through 8b) advertising the stores within the proposed shopping center would detract from the visual character of the area due to their proposed height and surface area. The pylon sign in the northwest corner of site (A1) would be 51 feet tall with a surface area of 765 SF while the pylon sign at the southwest corner (A2) would be 65 feet tall with a surface area of 1,754 SF. Heights over 45 feet above grade and surface area over 300 SF would exceed the height and area allowed under the Zoning Ordinance in the

unincorporated area. However in the various cities which are in proximity to the project, signs have been approved that are higher and larger. A height of 55 feet could be considered acceptable because of the existence of comparable retail center signage in the area. Examples of comparable signage in the unincorporated area occur at the following locations:

- Eastlake Terraces on SR-125 (4.6 miles from the project site): 57 feet high with 1,540 SF;
- Chula Vista Crossings on I-805 (5.4 miles away): 54 feet high with 1,160 SF;
- Eastlake Village Marketplace on SR-125 (5.5 miles away): 44 feet high and 880 SF;
- Pilot Travel Center on SR-125 (across from the project site): 45 feet high and 300 SF.

Recently (May 2010), a sign was installed in Chula Vista that exceeds the proposed height of the project's sign.

- Chula Vista Auto Park on I-805 (5.4 miles away): 120 feet high with 2,200-2,800 SF.

The new sign is set back from the freeway and is seen with a number of mature eucalyptus trees in the foreground, so that the scale of the sign is somewhat reduced. However, the proposed project's sign height and mass is no longer unique to the area. In addition, the smokestacks located to the southeast of the project site reach a height of 60 feet and the Specific Plan allows building heights up to 150 feet in the area north and east of the project site.

Figure 2.6-1a illustrates the appearance of the southwestern pylon sign from Otay Mesa Road. Figure 2.6-1b illustrates the northwestern pylon sign from the southbound side of SR-125. Although the overall height of the northwest sign (A1) would exceed 45 feet, as illustrated in Figure 1.8b, the sign would be 45 feet above the adjacent grade of SR-125. Thus, it would not appear taller than 45 feet to motorists traveling SR-125. Also the surface area would not substantially exceed County code. Consequently, A1 would not have a significant aesthetics impact.

However, as illustrated in Figure 2.6-1a, views of the 65-foot sign at the southwest corner of the site (A2) from Otay Mesa Road would not be blocked by topography. In fact, the sign would be elevated above the pavement level of Otay Mesa Road. As illustrated in Figure 2.6-2, large portions of the views of A2 from Otay Mesa Road would be blocked by an overpass associated with the future SR-125/I-905 interchange. Nevertheless, the height and surface area of the sign would be out of character with existing and future signage. **As a result, the 65-foot pylon sign at the southwest corner of the project would detract from the visual quality of the area and result in a significant aesthetics impact (AE-1).**

As indicated in Chapter 1.0, the project proposes one, and possibly two, retaining walls along the northern site boundary. One of the walls, along the eastern half of the northern boundary would range from 1.3 to 13.6 feet tall. A second potential wall could be constructed along the western half of the northern boundary in the event the adjacent property owner does not grant permission

to grade on their property. If constructed, this second wall would have a maximum height of 20 feet. A retaining wall on the western project boundary adjacent to the SR-125 ROW would be up to 18 feet high.

The retaining wall along SR-125 would not be visible to SR-125 motorists because of the elevation difference between the freeway lanes and the retaining walls, and the intervening berm along the SR-125. Motorists on Otay Mesa Road and Harvest Road would also not be able to see this wall because of the proposed intervening structures.

The retaining walls along the northern project boundary would also be blocked from views of motorists on Harvest Road and Otay Mesa Road because of intervening structures, except for the approximately 300 feet between Shops 5 and the northern project boundary where northbound motorists on Harvest Road would have glimpses of the wall between the proposed landscaping. Southbound traffic on SR-125 would not be able to see the northern retaining walls due to the topography, but northbound traffic may be able to see the portion of the northwestern wall to the west of the Major C building. This view would be partially screened by proposed vegetation.

Considering the limited visibility of the retaining walls and the screening provided by the proposed landscaping, the retaining walls would have a less than significant aesthetics impact.

Loss of Scenic Resources (Guideline 2)

The property does not exhibit any intrinsic visual qualities which would be impacted by the proposed development. As discussed above, the site does not possess native vegetation and does not have any notable topographic features. **Thus, the proposed project would result in a less than significant impact to scenic resources.**

View Impact (Guideline 3)

As indicated earlier, the property is located adjacent to two third-priority scenic highways: SR-125 and Harvest Road. However, as stated above, the property does not possess any notable visual resources which would enhance the visual experience of motorists traveling these roadways. Although the property does combine with other vacant land to form open space along these roadways, this open space is anticipated to be temporary given the fact that the property and immediately adjacent land is planned for industrial development.

The project would not interfere with views of the major scenic resources in the area. Views of Otay Mountain would be unimpeded by the proposed project and the Otay River Valley is not visible from the portions of SR-125 or Otay Mesa Road that lie adjacent to the subject property. The proposed pylon signs would only block a small portion of the large mountains and the duration of the blockage would be brief considering the speed at which motorist on SR-125 would normally pass the two signs as well as the fact that both signs would appear 45 feet tall from the motorist's perspective, meeting the intent of the Zoning Ordinance regulations. **Thus, the proposed project would result in an impact to views which would be less than significant.**

Visual Resource Policy Compliance

The Scenic Highway Element of the County General Plan (adopted January 1975, amended December 1986) was established to preserve and enhance the County's scenic, historic and recreational resources with a network of scenic highway corridors. The main goal of the Scenic Highway Element is to protect and enhance scenic resources within both rural and urban scenic highway corridors. Only two designated scenic highways exist within the County; State Route 125, between State Route 94 and U.S. Interstate 8, and State Route 78, within the Anza-Borrego Desert Park. The site is not located within the viewshed of these highways.

The Conservation Element of the County General Plan (adopted December 1975, amended April 2002) was established to conserve natural resources including biological, mineral, astronomical dark skies, and archeological and historical resources. From a visual perspective, the Conservation Element identifies Mother Miguel Mountain, San Miguel Mountain, and Otay Mountain as visual resources in the area.

While SR-125 and Heritage Road are County-designated scenic roadways, the proposed project does not possess any intrinsic visual resource value and would not significantly interfere with views of any identified significant visual resources in the area (e.g., Otay Mountain and Otay River Valley). **Thus, the proposed project would not conflict with the goals and policies of the Conservation or Scenic Highway Elements.**

All exterior lighting would comply with the requirements of the LPC through shielding and appropriate light source selection. These lighting controls would also comply with the requirements of the EOMSP Design Guidelines relative to the use of lighting. Per the EOMSP, parking area lighting is required to be on 15-foot tall poles and complementary to building architecture. Lighting is required to be directionally shielded and shall not overflow onto adjacent parcels. Building lighting is required to have no light source visible, and articulate and animate entrances. Pedestrian walkways are required to have point-to-point illumination to clearly identify the walkway and direction of travel. The project would meet these lighting specifications. **Thus, the proposed project would be consistent with the LPC and EOMSP relative controlling outdoor lighting and would result in a less than significant impact with respect to visual resource policies.**

2.6.3 Cumulative Impact Analysis

Cumulative landform alteration and aesthetics impacts of implementing the EOMSP were discussed in Section 7.2 of the EOMSP Final EIR. Based on that prior analysis, it was determined that some of the projects within the EOMSP area would require significant amounts of landform alteration, while other projects on Otay Mesa would require very little landform alteration. It was further noted that none of the projects in the EOMSP area would alter the basic landforms of the three major features in the area: Otay River Valley, Otay Mesa and the San Ysidro Mountains. It was, therefore, concluded in the prior Final EIR that cumulative visual impacts would not be significant.

A list of current projects was developed for the EOMSP area to re-evaluate the conclusions reached in the prior analysis. The EOMSP area features both level mesa and steep hillsides. No landmarks, mature trees or rock outcrops are prominent in the area. The only two designated scenic roadways are SR-125 and Heritage Road. None of the proposed projects within the cumulative study area would alter the basic landforms that contribute to the scenery that will be visible from those corridors. The only project in the cumulative study area that would substantially alter landforms is the Otay Hills Extraction Operation since it would involve extraction operations within the steep hillsides in the lower foothill area of the eastern portion of the EOMSP area. All other projects, including the proposed project, are proposed on the level or gently sloping mesa, and would not require extensive grading to implement. The project contribution to the cumulative visual impact would be minimal given the site does not contain scenic visual resources and would block a very minor portion of long-range mountain views from public roadways. Furthermore, this is the only regional commercial project currently planned for the EOMSP area and industrial projects and district commercial projects usually do not require large signs to attract customers. Assuming none of the other commercial and industrial projects would involve signage that would not conform with the County's sign height and coverage regulations, no cumulative visual impacts would be anticipated; and no other cumulative visual impacts would occur consistent with the EOMSP FEIR.

2.6.4 Significance of Impacts Prior to Mitigation

Based on the analysis provided above, the proposed project would have the following significant impacts prior to mitigation.

Impact AE-1: The 65-foot sign at the southwest corner would significantly impact the aesthetics of the surrounding area.

2.6.5 Mitigation

One form of mitigation would take the form of a reduced height and surface area for the sign. The mitigation would reduce the sign height to 55 feet and surface area to 1,300 SF or less. The applicant declines to implement this mitigation for the following reasons. As discussed in Chapter 1.0, the two pylon signs are the principal means of advertising the shopping center tenants to motorists travelling through the area. For maximum readability, the anchor store's logo needs to be at least 12 to 15 feet in overall height. Sign panels on the pylon signs for tenants must be at least five feet high to allow for letter sizes from 24-36 inches for optimum freeway visibility based on the sign consultant's past experience. Based on these design criteria and the need to place up to five tenants and one anchor store on each of the pylon signs, the overall height of the sign is proposed to be 65 feet tall which includes 15 feet for anchor sign, 25 feet for five tenants at five feet each, five feet for shopping center identification, 12 feet for design elements, and an eight-foot clearance above ground level. Because the applicant declines to implement this mitigation, it is presented as a project alternative in Section 4.6.

Another effective mitigation measure would be to soften the sign height and mass with landscaping as follows:

M-AE-1: In order to reduce the project's direct impact on aesthetics, the applicant will be required to submit and implement an enhanced landscape plan that complements the height and scale of sign A2 and reduces its visual impact to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Land Use by incorporating the following elements:

1. The landscape plan shall include tall shrubs surrounding sign A2 to block views of the sign's pylon base and reduce the sign's apparent height as seen from Otay Mesa Road and the SR-125 on-ramp. These shrubs shall be selected and maintained such that they would not obscure the actual signage area.
2. The landscape plan shall include at least three 48" box Canary Island pine trees located around sign A2, with two trees north of the sign and one tree south of the sign, to complement the height and scale of the sign without significantly obscuring its visibility from Otay Mesa Road or SR-125.
3. The final selection of perimeter screening trees along SR-125 shall include Canary Island pine trees, especially near signs A1 and A2.

2.6.6 Conclusion

The proposed pylon sign at the southwest corner of the project site would result in a significant aesthetics impact (Impact AE-1). Mitigating this impact would either require a detailed landscaping treatment (M-AE-1), or adoption of a project alternative that the applicant declines to implement due to the reduced effectiveness of the sign. Either of these actions would result in a less than significant aesthetics impact because the sign would be in character with other signs that have been built in the vicinity.


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Eastbound Otay Mesa Road at 640 feet
west of the proposed southern pylon sign.



Westbound on Otay Mesa Road at 640 feet
east of the proposed southern pylon sign.

 Represents approximate dimensions of future freeway
overpass. See Figure 2.6-2 for additional information.

Source: UltraSigns, 2010

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Pylon Sign Photosimulations (Otay Mesa Road)

CALIFORNIA CROSSINGS

Figure 2.6-1a



Southbound SR-125 at 640 feet north of the proposed northern pylon sign.

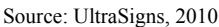
Source: UltraSigns, 2010

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Pylon Sign Photosimulation (SR-125)

CALIFORNIA CROSSINGS

Figure 2.6-1b



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CALIFORNIA CROSSINGS

Figure 2.6-2